



# **DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR**

## **news release**

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

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### **ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED BUDGET WOULD INCREASE FUNDING FOR BROAD RANGE OF CONSERVATION PROGRAMS**

President Clinton is proposing a \$1.3 billion budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Fiscal Year 1998 that includes significant increases in funding for endangered species conservation, wildlife habitat restoration, refuge operations, fisheries, and migratory bird management.

The President's budget calls for \$688 million in appropriated funding for the Service, a \$33.8 million, or 5 percent, increase over the FY 1997 appropriation, and \$608 million in permanent funding.

"The American people have made it clear they consider conserving our Nation's fish and wildlife a top priority as we move into a new century," Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said. "The President's budget for the Fish and Wildlife Service reflects this desire to see wild places and wild creatures handed down as an inheritance to future generations."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency with responsibility for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats. The Service manages 509 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 65 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

The President's budget calls for an increase of \$14.9 million, or 6 percent, for the Service's refuges and wildlife program that includes management of the refuge system, law enforcement, and migratory bird conservation. The vast majority of these additional funds would be used to support the operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands set aside for wildlife. The increase in funding will not only allow refuge managers to make habitat improvements but also to open up more opportunities for the public to enjoy wildlife-related recreation such as fishing, hunting, and bird watching.

The budget also proposes an increase of \$11.4 million, or 17 percent, in appropriations for the Service's endangered species program. More than half of the additional funds would be used to meet growing demands for consultations required under the Act and to develop habitat conservation plans with landowners. These voluntary agreements allow economic development to continue on private land while conserving threatened and endangered species. The Service expects to assist with 400 HCPs in 1998.

The budget also includes an additional \$3 million, or 4 percent increase, for the fisheries program. This includes an additional \$1 million to control non-indigenous fish and plant species and to survey fish pathogens and diseases in 10 critical watersheds. Another \$578,000 will be used to expand hatchery production of lake trout to implement the Secretary's Great Lakes initiative.

"The theme that runs through this budget is that the Fish and Wildlife Service is in partnership with the American people to conserve our fish and wildlife resources for future generations while allowing people as much opportunity as possible to enjoy them today," said Acting Service Director John Rogers.

Other highlights of the President's budget include:

- o An increase of \$5.3 million, or 53 percent, in the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. The fund supports private-public partnerships that conserve and restore wetland ecosystems in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The \$15 million from the fund is expected to be matched by \$34.5 million from partners, allowing 337,000 acres of wetlands to be acquired, restored, or conserved.
- o An additional \$1.6 million, or 9 percent, for the Service's work in support of the President's Northwest Forest Plan. The \$19.7 million in total funding would allow the Service to continue expediting the endangered species consultation process for timber harvest and related activities, work with other Federal agencies to implement an ecosystem approach to land management, and work with landowners on HCPs. The budget also continues \$2.4 million in funding for the Jobs-in-the-Woods program to employ displaced timber industry workers on habitat restoration projects.
- o An increase of \$300,000, or 4 percent, for conservation efforts in the South Florida ecosystem, which encompasses 26,000 square miles in the state's 19 southernmost counties. The \$7 million in funding will help restore this fragile ecosystem, which includes the Everglades.
- o An increase of \$1.8 million, or 12 percent, in the migratory bird management program to augment the Service's conservation and monitoring efforts for wild birds.